Nova Scotia
Advisory Council on
the Status of Women

92-01454/

SUBMISSION TO THE HALIFAX COUNTY-BEDFORD DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD RACE RELATIONS COMMITTEE

JOINTLY PREPARED BY THE
NOVA SCOTIA ADVISORY COUNCIL
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
AND
THE BLACK WOMEN'S NETWORK

APRIL 1990

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women
P.O. Box 745, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 2T3
(902) 424-8662

INTRODUCTION

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women strives to promote equality of opportunity for all women in this province. Recently, the Advisory Council's attention has been focused on the particular difficulties faced by Black women.

We are concerned that sexism, classism and racism continue to plague women in their struggle for equality. Black women are under-represented at all levels of society and face barriers in gaining education, employment and access to services.

In response, the Advisory Council has initiated, in cooperation with a number of women active in the Black community, a series of on-going meetings that will allow us an opportunity to share concerns, learn from each other, and plan concerted action. The Status of Women/Black Women's Network is pleased to have this opportunity to appear before the Halifax County-Bedford District School Board, and commends the board's initiative in setting up this committee to examine race relations, ethnic relations and multi-cultural policy.

Indigenous Black Nova Scotians carry with them a sense of their historical oppression as a result of their skin colour. Black women have historically faced an additional obstacle--sexism--which has created a double discrimination resulting in a severe constraining of education and employment options.

Black students' distrust of white teachers and counsellors and their reluctance to disclose personal information or feelings must be understood in the context of their experience of a system which has historically failed them. Black students have in the past received a quality of education which has differed significantly from that of their white peers. Much work must be done to correct this historical discrimination and to win back the trust of our young people.

MULTI-CULTURAL EDUCATION

We understand that each year the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission endeavors to make a presentation to several different schools in the province. Not only could this resource be used more frequently, but many Black and ethnic groups would willingly devote time and energy to presentations within the school system to increase staff and student awareness of multicultural issues. Our educational system should be a place where different cultural traditions are supported and valued, and where an understanding is fostered of the special difficulties faced by historically disadvantaged students.

CURRICULUM

School board curriculum materials should be examined for bias, particularly historical texts which portray non-whites in a very limited way, based on stereotypes now recognized as racist. This is no less true for the portrayal of women in a historical context. Finding a Black woman in a Canadian history book--other than Harriet Tubman--is a virtually impossible task.

As we have seen in the controversy surrounding the Parks Canada hiring policy on Citadel Hill, historical "accuracy" is

a subjective and limited experience and should be abandoned if such measures result in discriminatory practices, however unintended. More education is needed for policy makers, administrators, and teachers to enable them to more easily recognize the ethnocentric focus of much of our written and visual material.

Eliminating racist materials is not enough, however. A concerted effort must be made to foster multicultural understanding. Texts and audio-visual materials must be sought out that actively counteract racism and promote racial awareness and acceptance. Since intolerance has been learned, tolerance must be taught.

TEACHERS/GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS

A serious effort must be made through affirmative action policies to recruit greater numbers of black teachers and school guidance counsellors, particularly women who often face double discrimination in the hiring process. We recommend that this committee review the recently implemented Dalhousie Law School affirmative action policy for use as a guide.

Black staff can bring an understanding of racism to the classroom and the counselling session that is a valuable teaching tool for minority and white students alike. Teachers and guidance counsellors are important role models for young people. No advancement in eliminating racism will be made until all students see Black faces at the front of the classroom, and behind the counsellor's desk.

ACADEMIC STANDING

A statistical analysis of the streaming of students based on their ethnic background should be undertaken. It appears that

a greater percentage of non-white students end up in the general rather than the academic stream. We suggest that this trend, if it indeed exists, is examined very carefully with a view to counteracting those forces which currently exist to create this situation. The quality of education students receive at the elementary and secondary level greatly determines their likelihood of pursuing post-secondary education and determines their employment options; in short, it has implications for their entire lives.

Much literature has been written in the past decade on the racism and sexism inherent in IQ and other intelligence and achievement tests, as well as in those used for psychological and emotional testing. It is strongly suggested that this committee review the relevant literature and assess all the tests used under the direction of the Halifax County-Bedford District School Board. Clearly, tests in which Black students consistently score lower than white students should be discarded.

RACIAL HARASSMENT

Incidents of racial harassment and violence in Nova Scotia schools that have come to public attention, particularly in Cole Harbour and New Glasgow, has raised the level of awareness of the existence of racism in our education system. Such violence must be treated with the seriousness it deserves. Policies must be formulated which send a clear statement to the perpetrators and to the public that such activity will not be tolerated, but at the same time we must allow for real learning to take place around issues of racism. As such incidents are presently handled, they often serve to inflame racist sentiments rather than to promote understanding and tolerance.

CONCLUSION

In closing, we suggest that this committee actively pursue an investigation of the race relations and multicultural education policies now in place in other parts of Canada to ensure that the very best, most comprehensive, and most proven policy be adopted by this school board. In addition, we suggest that the Race Relations Committee of the Halifax County-Bedford District School Board recommend to the Nova Scotia School Boards Association that all boards in this province undertake a process to develop policy in this important area.